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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of maternal employment status on 63 adolescent girls in the areas of: (1) academic achievement; (2) satisfaction with family life and with emotional support from peers and adults; (3) mother-child communication; and (4) mothers' and daughters' perception of family adaptability and cohesion. A brief review of the literature on the effects of maternal employment on children is provided. The most frequently supported conclusion since the 1960s is that, taken by itself, the fact that a mother works outside the home has no universally predictable effects on a child. The findings and hypotheses regarding the effects of maternal employment on adolescents are somewhat contradictory. Some researchers have hypothesized that maternal employment may result in negative effects that emerge in adolescence, but the present findings do not support this hypothesis. The results of this study show no differences in adolescent outcomes for girls whose mothers are employed full-time, employed part-time, or not employed. This result confirms the conclusion in the literature that maternal employment status has no universally predictable effects on children. Appended are nine references and a table showing the daughters' percentile rankings on achievement test scores according to their mothers' employment status (GLR)

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Maternal Employment and Adolescent Girls

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ABSTRACT

The effects of maternal employment on adolescents has been a research area left largely unexplored. This study explored the effects of maternal employment status (full-time, part-time and nonemployed) on 63 adolescent girls in four areas: academic achievement, satisfaction with family life and with the emotional support available from peers and adults, mother-child communication, and mothers' and daughters' perception of family organization. The failure to find significant employment group differences in adolescent outcomes confirms the broader conclusion in the literature that maternal employment status has no universally predictable effects on the child.

Maternal Employment and Adolescent Girls

The most frequently supported conclusion since the 1960s is that, taken by itself, the fact that a mother works outside the home has no universally predictable effects on the child (Kamerman & Hayes, 1982). Rather, the effects of maternal employment appear to vary according to factors such as the age and sex of the child, and the family's socioeconomic status. While there has not been much research on the effects of maternal employment on adolescents, the existing findings and hypotheses are somewhat contradictory. When comparing adolescents of working and nonworking mothers, some studies have pointed to negative effects in areas including academic achievement (Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, & Ginsburg, 1986), family relations (Gold & Andres, 1978), social activities (Douvan & Adelson, 1966) and social networks (Abbott, 1989). However, other researchers have found differences in younger samples, but not in older samples of children as a function of maternal employment (e.g., sex role ideology, Dellas, Gaier & Eshimovich, 1979), and have suggested that the effects of maternal employment may diminish with the age of the child. Still others have suggested that the mother's dual role creates an environment that may be particularly appropriate for adolescents (Hoffman, 1979).

This study explored the effects of maternal employment status on adolescent girls in four areas: academic achievement, satisfaction with family life and with the emotional support available from peers and adults, mother-child communication and mothers' and daughters' perception of family organization (family adaptability and cohesion).

METHOD

The subjects consisted of 63 mother-daughter dyads from middle- and upper middle-class, two-parent families. All girls had completed either the 8th or 9th grade. The sample was divided into three groups based on maternal employment status: mothers who were employed full-time (n=25), employed part-time (n=15) and those who were not employed (n=23). Mothers had maintained their employment status for at least the last 3 years. Both mothers and daughters were asked to independently complete two questionnaires: Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III) (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985), and Parent-Adolescent Communication (Olson et al. , 1985). Daughters then completed the Family Satisfaction Scale (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen & Wilson, 1985), and were asked to list both the peers and the adults they "confide in or feel they could go to for advice or for help on a problem". Daughters were asked to rate separately their satisfaction with their peer supports and their adult supports on a ten point scale ranging from "not at all satisfied" to "extremely satisfied". Achievement test scores were obtained from school records.

RESULTS

No significant employment group differences emerged for daughters' satisfaction with their families, peer or adult supports, or for mothers' and daughters' reports of parent-adolescent communication (all $p > .10$).

There was a modest effect for employment on academic achievement $F(6,100) = 1.9$, $p < .08$, with daughters of part-time employed mothers obtaining higher percentile rankings on language achievement $F(2,51) = 4.23$, $p < .05$ than did daughters of of full-time and nonworking mothers. However, the significant univariate test was not confirmed by post-hoc analyses. While daughters of nonworking mothers showed a borderline tendency to have a higher percentile ranking on total achievement, the univariate test failed to attain significance $F(2,51) = 1.0$, p = N.S. Due to the high positive skew in percentile rankings (see Table), the findings pertaining to academic achievement must be interpreted with caution.

No significant main effect for employment emerged for mothers' and daughters' ratings of family adaptability and cohesion. However, there was a significant main effect for person reporting $F(2,58) = 12.30$, $p < .001$. Mothers in all employment groups reported significantly higher family cohesion than did daughters.

DISCUSSION

Some researchers have hypothesized that maternal employment may result in negative effects emerging in adolescence (Milne et al., 1986). The present findings do not support this hypothesis. Neither do the findings show daughters of working mothers to have an advantage over daughters of nonworking mothers in the areas of academic achievement, social support, and family relationships. Rather, the failure to find significant employment group differences in adolescent outcomes confirms the broader conclusion in the literature that maternal employment status per se has no predictable effect on child outcomes (Kamerman & Hayes, 1982).

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Daughters' Percentile Rankings on Achievement Test Scores by Employment Group

Employment Group	Language			Math			Total Achievement		
	M	s. d.	Range	M	s. d.	Range	M	s. d.	Range
Full-time	81.1	15.7	(49-99)	78.7	20.9	(52-99)	84.3	17.0	(51-98)
Part-time	92.2	7.3	(75-99)	84.0	14.3	(58-99)	89.2	11.4	(62-99)
Nonworking	90.2	10.8	(64-99)	81.3	18.3	(61-99)	90.0	10.5	(62-99)